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ABSTRACT

This position paper was written by the New York State Science Supervisors Association (NYSSSA) in response to a statewide movement by some New York school districts to eliminate supervisory positions occupied by subject matter specialists. Recommendations and the rationale for supporting science supervisory positions are presented. This rationale focuses on science as basic education and on the supervisory role. The supervisory role includes: (1) historical background of supervision; (2) role-function of supervisors; (3) the need for supervision; and (4) supervision by specialists or by generalists. A list of references is also included. (HM)

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A Position Paper

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SCIENCE AS BASIC EDUCATION -

THE NEED FOR SUPERVISORY SPECIALISTS

A descriptive statement and

recommendations for action

The New York State Science Supervisors Association

(NYSSSA)

November 1978

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INTRODUCTION

This position paper has been written in response to a statewide movement by some New York school districts to eliminate supervisory positions occupied by subject matter specialists whose major concern and interest is the improvement of education within that discipline. We believe that basic subject areas such as science education should have the educational supervision roles performed by subject matter specialists and that the quality of science curricula and science instruction will be generally eroded if action is not taken to deter the present trend toward assigning this role to already overburdened generalists such as assistant superintendents and principals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The local educational agency (L.E.A.) should provide:

1. well articulated and coordinated science experiences that will develop the student's powers of critical thinking and reinforce the basic skills;

   Strategy – Program selection must be based on educationally sound student outcomes. The National Science Foundation, commercial publishing houses, intermediate school organization (BOCES), and local boards of education have funded a host of science curriculum projects. Some of these programs, if adopted or adapted, will meet the critical thinking and basic skills objectives without LEA's necessarily financing curriculum development through all stages.

2. a competent science educator, trained in the skills of supervision, to monitor the achievement of the district's science program, identify problem areas, and implement corrective actions;

   Strategy – The amount of time assigned to this responsibility will depend, of course, on the size of the LEA. Some large local agencies will require full-time supervisors while others will require personnel that are teaching part of the time or are shared with other agencies. Science supervisors, to be effective, must be given adequate time to address the above needs and the supervisory process must be carried out on a continuous basis.

3. a district-wide policy that will provide the science supervisor the authority to adequately evaluate the science program;

   Strategy – As part of the operating policy of the district, provision should be made not only for the general supervision of classroom practices, but the evaluation of specific techniques as they pertain to science education. The authority provided to the supervisors should be delineated in a job description.

4. the necessary resources to implement selected programs and/or to correct deficiencies in the program;

   Strategy – Implementing a new program will require more than assigning a teacher to the program. Usually there is also a need for unique items such as supplies, facilities, inservicing. While these items may depend on increased finances, support may also take the form of free or inexpensive community resources and talent. Once a new program is on-line, unforeseen difficulties will arise and added time and resources, if necessary, should be allocated for correction.

5. assessment of the science supervisor's performance, recommendations for improvement, and opportunities for involvement in professional growth activities;

   Strategy – The district administration should formally evaluate the supervisor's effectiveness and specific recommendations for improvement should be included in the assessment. The supervisor should follow a prescribed program of continued education by means of graduate and inservice courses, conferences, and visitations.

The New York State Education Department should guarantee:

1. that each school district in New York State has implemented a well-articulated program of science experiences which stress the powers of critical thinking and reinforces the basic skills of students;

   Strategy – The New York State Education Department should design, with the assistance of professional science educators from the local level, and implement a state-wide science testing program that evaluates the critical thinking skills of students.

2. that each school district in New York State has competent subject matter specialists responsible for the supervision of each of its subject matter areas to insure the proper implementation and monitoring of the instructional program;

   Strategy – The New York State Education Department should develop the necessary regulations to implement the intent of this recommendation and, in each of the supervisory visits made of local districts by department personnel, evaluate the quality of the supervision of the various instructional programs.

RATIONALE

SCIENCE AS BASIC EDUCATION

When Herbert Spencer asked a century ago what knowledge is of most worth, he concluded that it was knowledge of science (1, Brodinsky 1977). Many science educators today would agree that science is *the* basic. Their reasons come from the conviction that human survival depends on answers that will come from the study of science. John Dewey (2, Ost and George 1945) expanded on this further when he called upon teachers to instill "a scientific habit of mind," an approach to living that attempts to deal with the environment in an orderly fashion.

The explosion of information in the modern world, when combined with the proliferation of media communication, demands that our basic education include the skill of dealing with the multi-stimuli and rapid changes that characterize the present environment.

> A scientific way of thinking has become a survival tool for all individuals. We must be able to assimilate new data and respond accordingly, to generate ideas, and to test them . . .
>
> Science instruction is important also in fostering creativity, flexible thinking and self-worth. Exploring, investigating and drawing conclusions give students confidence in their ability to understand and explain their environment and to deal effectively with it (2, Ost and George 1945).

The present focus on *basic competency* suggests that schools enhance the ability of students to perform more successfully those competencies demanded in their life roles once they leave school (3, E.C.S. 1945). It follows logically then that science education, whose major goal is the ability to deal with the total environment which structures these life roles, becomes basic.

The more specific objectives of basic science education elaborate on this logic. As stated by the editors of "Science and Children" (4, 1978), these are to:

- develop within students the abilities to inquire, to ask many questions about how they see, hear, and read
- help students to choose questions for which they plan to gather data and from which they hope to draw conclusions
- provide students with the skills necessary to get sufficiently quantitative data to answer their initial questions
- help students understand the major "laws of nature" and their theoretical applications
- lead students to an understanding that scientific theory is human-made and is subject to change, and that the "facts" about the universe, as we think we know them, may have to be revised.

Reading, often thought of as the basic skill, is much more than decoding. Decoding itself requires observational skill, and reading comprehension is thinking. Both are skills of science. The transition from Piagetian concrete operational reasoning to formal operational thinking demands that those making this progression be able to reason from propositions, assumptions, and postulates (5, Renner and Grant 1978). A good *basic science* education program provides this skill training.

THE SUPERVISORY ROLE

There is a wealth of information from the research and theoretical literature which describes what educational supervision is and should be.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: Originally supervision was thought of as inspection and it was carried out by superintendents of schools. As the size of schools increased and new subjects were added to the curriculum, persons entitled supervisor were employed to aid in the inspection task (6, Christenson 1976). Extensive reviews of supervisors in education can be found in Tuttle (7, 1942), Barp (8, 1950), Burton and Brueckner (9, 1955), Theopane (10, 1957), Wiles (11, 1957), Harris (12, 1963), Wiles (13, 1967), Sudlow (14, 1969), and Bivens (15, 1971). The role-function of department heads in the public schools has been extensively reviewed by Patrinos (16, 1969) and McNelis (17, 1969).

In general, a review of the literature traces the supervisory role from that of "Inspection" to more positive definitions such as that of Stewart (18, 1970) " . . . *a creative, and dynamic role of organizational leadership with the purpose of improving the teaching-learning situation.*"

SUPERVISORY ROLE-FUNCTION: The role-function of supervisors can be delineated both into broad categories and into comprehensive sets of practices, procedures, and conditions. Mann (19, 1971) derived three general categories of supervisory competence -- human, technical, and managerial. Mann believes that to perform the functions required to coordinate the activities of one organizational family with another, the supervisor must have *administrative* competence; to integrate organizational objectives with individual member needs the supervisor must have *human-relations* competence; and to accomplish other assigned tasks including the performance of *technical operations*, the supervisor must possess the ability to use knowledge, methods, techniques, and equipment necessary for the performance of specific tasks. Both the subject-matter specialist supervisor and the generalist supervisor are capable of developing administrative and human-relations competencies. However, it is not feasible for the generalist to adequately develop personal competence in the performance of technical operations for each and every subject area. We contend that educational institutions cannot afford to ignore the technical dimension of supervision through elimination of the position of subject matter supervisor.

Neville (20, 1963) ascertained the views of teachers regarding supervision. He used a comprehensive set of validated criteria which were developed by Dull to evaluate supervisory programs. The following is a list of some of the practices, procedures, and conditions which emerged from Neville's study as very important in the development of supervisory programs and that make a difference in the quality of instruction.

- The supervisory program provides for cooperative development of both immediate and long-range curriculum plans.
- Opportunity is provided for teachers to study in groups on problems of concern to them.
- There is continuous evaluation of the instructional program.

- Teachers are encouraged to assume leadership positions.
- Job expectations and relationships are understood by professional staff.
- There exists a coordinated attack upon pupil personnel problems and the diagnosis of learning difficulties.
- Facilities and resources to strengthen the development of the curriculum are given priority consideration.
- Supervisors are "master teachers."
- The plan for evaluation of teachers is cooperatively evolved.
- The evaluation system reflects the spirit of inservice development and not that of inspection.
- The focus for curriculum development is the needs of the individual school.
- Teachers are involved in curriculum development on the basis of their interests, and the needs of the school.
- An adequate library of professional materials is available to teachers.
- Teachers participate in the planning and organization of their meetings.
- A major portion of staff meetings is reserved for dealing with the improvement of instruction.
- Demonstration teaching followed by constructive group discussions is arranged to show methods, procedures, and instructional devices.

We maintain that the subject matter specialist supervisor is far more likely to have the time and the know-how necessary to deliver that desirable supervisory program which is necessary if instruction is to be improved.

The role-function of the science supervisor or the science department head has been reviewed by Mathewson (21, 1943), Carleton (22, 1946), Ploutz (23, 1962), Cannon (24, 1964), Ploutz (25, 1966), and Goode (26, 1968). Ploutz (25, 1966) found that science supervisors spend the greatest amount of their time (in descending order of frequency): assisting teachers in the classroom; providing materials, supplies, and information; leading curriculum development; organizing with department heads, principals, and superintendents; providing inservice education; teaching demonstration classes; and administering government funded projects.

Within New York State, Ritz (27, 1976) found that the science supervisor's actions during a typical, professional work week were, in descending order, likely to be: consulting with teachers, teaching pupils, performing curriculum activities, performing activities related to supplies/equipment, and evaluating teachers.

THE NEED FOR SUPERVISION: Stewart (28, 1969) determined relationships among the perceptions of supervisory behavior expressed by teachers, supervisors, and principals. Each group showed basic agreement in perception of the importance of supervisory behavior. This indicates congruence among groups in their role expectations for supervisors. Stewart's finding that there are differences in the level of use of supervisory behaviors supports earlier findings that there are differences in perceptions of the degree of effectiveness in the performance of tasks rather than in the types of activities performed. Supervisors do have the support of teachers and principals when and if supervisory tasks are being performed competently. *Teachers do want supervision of the right kind -- cooperative, participatory, democratic -- they want help rather than answers to their problems (28, Palmer in Stewart 1969).*

Science education, due to its technical nature, constantly changing curricula, and ever-increasing body of knowledge particularly require competent, professional assistance to the classroom teacher. Blackwood (29, 1965) surveyed science teaching practices in the elementary schools and reported that the lack of consultant service was indicated by schools as a most important barrier to good science teaching.

Steiner (30, 1974) reported similar findings following a survey of science teaching practices. *The best predictor of the teacher's role in all regions of the nation was whether there was consultant or supervisory help for teaching science within the school system.* Those teachers provided with consultant help did not perceive the lack of it as a problem and those who did not receive consultant help perceived that the lack of consultant help made it very difficult for them to offer effective science teaching. Also, teachers provided with consultant and supervisory help tended to be more satisfied with the teaching of elementary science.

Weiss (31, 1978) after a national survey of science, mathematics, and social studies education reports that teachers perceive their greatest needs to include obtaining information about instructional materials, learning new teaching methods, implementing the discovery/inquiry approach, and using hands-on manipulative materials. She reports *the need for obtaining subject matter information as significantly greater in elementary science and social studies than in other disciplines.*

At the secondary school level, Welch (32, 1977) conducted a systematic needs assessment through discrepancy analysis using teachers and principals to identify priority goals for science education. The needs for students in secondary education as reported by principals and science teachers are information processing and decision making skills, basic skills, and student self-esteem. *The highest rated tactic need was in the area of support personnel which includes such things as whether science consultants are available.* It is Welch's conviction that if we do provide more time availability to our science teachers, and do provide them with better facilities, the goals of increased student self-esteem, development of basic skills, ability to process the large amounts of information they encounter daily, and ability to effectively approach decisions they must make, will be obtainable.

SUPERVISION BY SPECIALISTS OR BY GENERALISTS? Hale (33, 1966) has described the benefits derived from one individual of deep concern and boundless energy having the overall responsibility for developing the science program. She states that the "right person" will see to it that lines of communication are kept open, that honest effort is constantly encouraged, that the appropriate people are appointed to committees and the most competent consultants employed, that all available resources are brought to bear on the task, and that the philosophy which develops as the project proceeds is carried out in both curriculum production and daily teaching. *The belief we have is that that "right person" is not a generalist such as an assistant superintendent for instruction or a principal, but is a subject specialist such as a science supervisor or science department head.*

Mathewson (34, 1942) found that the head of the science department stands out well above other science supervisory levels in importance to science teachers. Where available, the city science supervisor ranked second in importance. The principal and superintendent were viewed as being of low importance to science teaching. Mathewson speculates that *generalists contribute so little to science teaching* not because they don't care, but *because so many of them are enmeshed in administrative details -- attendance, discipline, parent complaints, budgets and supplies* -- that they are thankful to leave teachers to their own devices as long as things run smoothly.

Skolnick (35, 1960) more recently quoted similar findings which show teachers generally prefer the supervision by the department chairman to that of the principal or to an outsider. He explained their preference in this way:

> Facing the same problems in his own classes, the department chairman understands and sympathizes with his teachers . . . Instead of being thrown on their own, they can count on the department chairman to plan with them, and to help them with teaching and discipline problems.

Evidence that the supervisory subject matter specialist rather than the generalist is preferable continues to accumulate in more recent studies. Consider, for example, two important supervisory functions -- implementing curriculum innovations and providing inservice training. The importance of these topics is emphasized by Schlessinger (36, 1971) who, following a survey of secondary school science teaching practices, reported fifty-five percent of teachers assigning highest priority to the importance of innovative science curricula in obtaining and maintaining a quality science program and thirty percent of teachers assigning highest priority to inservice education as an important factor in having a high quality science program. The Rand Study conducted by Greenwood (37, 1975) revealed that the implementation of innovations in schools are most successful when the following factors are present: a strong training component; practical "how-to-do-it" workshops; local expertise and technical assistance; frequent regular staff meetings; local materials development; and voluntary, highly motivated participants. *Teachers participating in the implementation of innovations have been found to want*

> Very concrete "how-to-do-it" workshops . . . given by *local personnel . . . people who knew what they were doing, understood what potential problems might arise, and had the experience to make specific suggestions to help teachers improve their performance* . . . Outside consultants were almost always ineffective and disappointing. Teachers felt that outside experts could not understand their particular problems and were unable to give practical advice.

The 1977 evaluation of the National Diffusion Network which promotes the spread of successful practices to schools across the nation also has reported that successfully implemented projects are characterized by strong local leaders backed by administrative support.

The National Science Teachers Association (38, 1978) position statement recommends that school districts employ one or more science specialists (supervisor, coordinator, consultant) to accomplish the tasks of the science program. They provide the following rationale for their recommendation:

- the majority of the key decision makers, such as building and central office administrators, have expertise in areas other than science subject matter,

- the screening, hiring, orientation, and inservice training of science teachers requires knowledgeable persons with in-depth subject matter training,
- the ability to provide appropriate programs to meet the varying needs of pupils requires extensive knowledge of science program alternatives,
- the selection of substantive content within these programs requires in-depth science knowledge,
- the selection of instructional materials, methods, and media to support programs and substantive content, as educational trends change, requires in-depth subject matter expertise,
- the efficient management of pupil and teacher time requires in-depth subject matter knowledge and experience, and
- the nature of modern science education requires specialized facilities unique to this domain.

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Membership in this organization is open to all supervisory personnel whose major concern and interest is the improvement of science instruction, including science department heads, chairpersons, coordinators, consultants, supervisors and directors.

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